CHAPTER XXV

PALESTINIAN PROBLEMS

(1) THE ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY OP PALESTINE

THE question which is often asked as to how many Jews can find a livelihood in Palestine cannot be answered, as the absorptive capacity of a country depends on variable economic conditions. During the four centuries of Turkish rule, Palestine was sadly neglected. The marvellous Roman waterworks were allowed to fall into disrepair, forests were cut down, while under the feudal system the soil was culti-vated in an irrational manner. Political and economic insecurity forced the fellaheen tenants to limit themselves to the growing of cereals—uncertain in their tenure they could hardly plant fruit-trees. Thus Palestine, though in its climate and soil better suited for the cultivation of trees, was converted into a grain-growing country. In modem times, therefore, it could hold its own among the great new grain countries only by lowering the standard of living of its peasants to a degrading minimum. After fifteen years of British administration conditions are slightly better, but to this day the fellaheen, who form the majority of the Arab population, can eke out a mere

pittance from their land. They live chiefly on their own produce, and bring little to market, so that their purchasing power is small.

This naturally results in a serious limitation of trade. In other countries Jewish immigrants find as traders considerable scope in non-Jewish agriculture, industry, and handicrafts, but whatever openings there are for trade in Palestine are already worked by the very efficient Arab traders.